



Personal Scenario Planning: Writing the Story of Your Future

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Introduction

Scenario planning is a proven planning tool for imagining different paths forward into the future, both desirable and undesirable. It involves creating two or more plausible 'storylines' that involve different decisions, actions, and eventual results. By comparing your scenarios, you can gain see more clearly the actions you can take that are likely to result in success. Think of it as a 'flight simulator' for life.

How it Works

The starting point is to reflect on the flow of life events – past, present, and possible future – that will influence your future results. Some will be opportunities, some will be challenges, some will be inevitable, and still others will be unpredictable. Scan your current roles, relationships, and commitments across all areas of your life. List the most important influences, 'drivers', and 'unknowns' you need to consider. From here, scenario planning involves weaving these into stories that test out different actions and their possible consequences. As with a flight simulator, even if you 'crash the plane', no one gets hurt... but you do learn a lot that can help you safely navigate your way forward.

The Setup & Simple Process

Imagine that it is 3 years in the future, and you're summarizing where you are at that point in your life – all of it – and how you got to that point. A simple approach is to craft a pair of contrasting scenarios: a success story, where everything works out well in the end, and a failure story, where your actions – or lack thereof – lead to an undesirable future. Be sure to include the challenges you met along the way, as well, and highlight the key decisions and actions that had the biggest impact – for better or worse – on your results.

For more ideas and next steps, check out the next page!

Taking Scenario Planning to Another Level...

If you watch enough movies or TV series, you know there are predictable plot lines that underlie what you're seeing on the screen. You can adapt these to create multiple scenarios, with different storylines and 'endings.' The first one below, *Infinite Possibility*, is a good thought-starter for a success story. Consider pairing it with one or more of the other three to outline different paths into the future. All four assume eventual success but some involve bigger challenges and risks. Finally, consider how your stories might end in failure if your actions fall short. Remember... fear can be a good motivator!

Infinite Possibility

In this scenario, your future is bright, anything's possible, and there are no insurmountable obstacles. The eternal optimist in you sees opportunities, not problems. Any clouds have silver linings, hidden possibilities are revealed, and creative solutions turn problems into opportunities. The path forward is well-lit and you see clearly the steps you need to take to achieve your goals are clear.

Challenge and Response

As the 'hero' of your story, you face one test after another, but through it all you emerge successful, and somehow changed for the better. Some challenges are more threatening and overcoming them can take a toll. Your responses require determination and persistence, and you may have scars to prove that you've been in a battle. But, in the end, you reach your goal and you've grown a lot.

Inch by Inch

As the proverb says, "*A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.*" Your intended future may seem a long way off, perhaps even an impossible dream. It's going to be a long march, not a quick sprint, and it will require perseverance and discipline. But instead of being discouragement, you work step-by-step to reach your destination, celebrating your progress all along the way.

Turning Point

Perhaps there's been a significant disruption in your life, or maybe you've realized you're at a crossroads. Something has served as a wake-up call that demands quick action. To move forward, you realize you've got major decisions or big changes to make. Your future depends on today's choices, the stakes are high, the clock's ticking, and there's no turning back.

Analyzing Your Stories and Moving Toward Action

Once you've outlined your stories, share them with someone who knows you well. Explain the premise of the exercise and invite them to ask questions or share feedback, thereby enriching your scenarios.

Next, review the stories and look for themes or patterns in several categories of actions you took: those that make sense regardless of future events; those that are specific to certain opportunities or challenges; and any you realize require advance preparation or capacity-building for you to be effective. This list represents your Action Priorities, and must be translated into focused commitments, projects and meaningful actions, and then integrated with your other ongoing life commitments.